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ADYAR PAMPHLETS

No. 70

Man's Waking Consciousness

A Lecture in a Course on Consciousness

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October 1916

PHILOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

ADYAR, MADRAS, INDIA

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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Man's Making Consciousness

If I were to endeavour to trace in detail all the stages through which the evolving life of the Logos moves onwards to its destiny, I should not only need many more lectures than the one allotted to me, but also a keener vision than that which at present I possess. Within the limits of one short hour the survey must necessarily be broad, and much knowledge must already be assumed. I shall, however, try to put my subject as simply as possible—confining myself to broad statements which I believe to be of general application, though often requiring modification as regards details and special conditions.

To recapitulate briefly the processes by which man acquires what is known as his waking consciousness, let us think for a moment of the Logos as an immense Flame of light, one great all-embracing Consciousness, existing, perhaps, as a spark in some still more vivid light, but in itself complete, cognising its own perfection on its own plane. Living in itself as an undivided whole, this Flame wills to live consciously in all its innumerable parts; for there is no ultimate perfection of a whole until each smallest

part attains the stature of the whole of which it has been a part. And so this Flame—existing in its own Divinity, or dwelling (as Theosophists might say) on the divine plane of nature—begins to throw out its consciousness, to evolve from itself the planes of its nature, on each of which its constituent parts shall evolve as the Flame itself has evolved in the dim and distant past. The Flame reproduces the conditions of its own evolution, conditions which it has built up into its own nature, and spreads them outwards—through an act of will spoken of in Theosophical literature as the Third Life-Wave—as the various planes of nature, in some of which we are living consciously. Out rushes the life of the Flame, joyous in the task it is destined to accomplish; and the busy activity, sending out the parts on this journey towards self-conscious Divinity, is seen in the myriad sparks scintillating and shining in their unconscious splendour. These sparks, Monads, consciousnesses individualised from the one divine Consciousness, are the future Flames destined to bring forth future universes; and you and I, sparks of our own Divinity, are travelling on the path which, leading to our own perfection, shall bring forth many perfection: in all the life which has gathered round us on our upward climb.

The Flame itself, living on the plane of Flame, in that region of nature where Divinity alone may dwell, sends down its life on to the plane of sparks—the monadic, separates itself into its constituent parts, each of which is a reflection at a lower level of itself

on the higher. Just as the Flame itself has within it the threefold aspect of its own development, the period of its creation, the period of its growth, the period of its accomplishment—Sat, Chit, Ānanda—so the Monads, parts growing into the semblance of the whole from which they come, not only receive from the Logos the conditions of their growth, but reflect from Him His threefold aspect as Manas, Buddhi and Ātmā, reflections which manifest as life on the mānasic, buddhic and ātmic, planes of nature. Thus consciousness, residing as to the part unconsciously on the plane of Divinity, feels its way outwards, first to the plane of nature in which the Divine is seen in its individualised aspect—the monadic—then ever onwards through the ātmic, buddhic and higher mānasic planes of pure Spirit (Will), Wisdom, or Intuition, in its highest form, and Mind in its aspect of Creative Activity. We must remember that all the while the divine Flame is behind the monadic spark, just as the Monad is behind the vestures of these three planes which it has assumed on its road towards the outermost circumference of manifestation drawn by its Divinity. The combined vesture of the ātmic, buddhic and higher mānasic planes is generally spoken of as the jīvātmā, or ego, for the life enshrouded in the matter of these three planes is the only reflection of the ultimate Divinity which consciousness in the densest planes shall know for ages upon ages of slow though steady growth.

But the outpouring of life does not stop when the higher mānasic plane has been reached, for the divine

Flame has made other manifestations of itself in which its consciousness is to function, that it may know of the entirety of its nature. And so the *jīvātmā*, working through the Second Life-Wave of the Logos, sends its consciousness outwards through the second division of the *mānasic* plane—the lower—through the astral, finally reaching the physical, which is the densest plane of nature, the outermost circle of the life of the Logos.

Thus the Flame, which is Divinity unmanifested, becomes Divinity in manifestation, stretching its consciousness to the extreme limits which its force can reach. But the consciousness living in the planes builded by one Life-Wave, and growing through the instrumentality of another, is not *self*-conscious save on the plane of its own Divinity, and then only as the undivided whole. Thus we might say that this Flame, or Logos, is Self-conscious in His own Divine Nature, and that His evolution consists in His becoming, in His aspect of separated units of consciousness (Monads), Self-conscious in each portion of His Being, so that the part may become as the whole already is, and may, in the fulness of its own time, send out its Life-Waves to multiply itself into many.

It would take too long, and would indeed be beyond my power, to trace the life as it proceeds downwards, or rather outwards, in its descent into matter. Let us take it at its turning-point in the mineral kingdom, from which it proceeds upwards through the vegetable, into the animal, and thence into the human, gaining self-consciousness on each plane as it ascends, or as it

turns inwards, reaping the harvest which the Third Life-Wave has provided for its garnering, finally meeting the last outpouring from the Logos, "Heaven kissing Earth," which welcomes back the wanderer to its newly-gained self-conscious Divinity. I have called the mineral kingdom the turning-point, because, while consciousness still sleeps in the bosom of its own infinity while living in its coarsest sheath, there is the faintest sign of the dawning of that self-consciousness for which it has made its long and weary pilgrimage. It sleeps, but it stirs uneasily, as a man may stir uneasily in some vivid, strange and fearful dream; and Professor Bose of Calcutta has shown in the mineral these stirrings, faint preludes as they are to the mighty stirrings of God awakened in man.

The earthquake, the storm, the rumblings of the volcano—these are the life-signs of the mineral, by which the Monads, in "the silence and the darkness" of their existence on their own plane, first hear of the approach of the messengers they have sent out to bring them knowledge of their surroundings. Busy indeed is the life as it feels itself in the kingdom of which it is the king, and as the forms heave and roll and clash, are rent asunder or crash together, consciousness stirs, little thrills begin to send their wavelets inwards, and the varieties of experiences begin to mark out consciousness, so that the Monads, silently watching the life as it grows, gradually feel their self-conscious way into separated forms. In this way does the consciousness within respond to the

impacts upon its vehicles, and as the response begins to grow more articulate, more coherent, the mineral form breaks up, so that the wanderer from his divine home may gain more experience than the fetters of the mineral kingdom permit—having experienced the fetters, having lived self-consciously within their narrow limits.

A very poor self-consciousness, you will say. Yes, but it was the beginning without which the physical consciousness could not have come; without which the circulation of our blood, the beatings of the heart, the automatic birth and decay of cells—now all sub-conscious, but, under other conditions, within what may be called the then “waking” consciousness—would claim an attention which now we may concentrate on an inner plane of consciousness. In the mineral kingdom physical consciousness reigns supreme, and there are only the very slightest evidences that the consciousness is being pushed inwards to the astral plane and coming thence as a reflection into the physical. But even these slightest tremors imperatively demand a finer vehicle, and the call of the life, which is the master of its mineral form, is for some more separated existence than the mineral kingdom affords.

Then it is that the life flows into the vegetable world on its upward path, and the consciousness, hitherto sleeping, begins to dream the dreams that precede waking, and the stirring of the consciousness on the astral plane, while unconscious in its own plane, sends out small pleasure-pain judgments to

which the finer matter of the vegetable forms more readily responds. But the seat of consciousness, the dwelling-place of its waking state, is still the physical plane and the physical plane alone, and indeed its waking condition is rather that of an awareness, a growing awareness, than that of the perception of the animal and of the human being.

Passing through the experiences appropriate to the vegetable kingdom, the life presses itself still more self-consciously to the inner plane—the astral—receiving, as a result of its increased pressure, more decided impacts on its physical form, more definite repulsions and attractions. Then comes a further step upwards into the animal kingdom, in which the channels, open between the astral and the physical worlds, give the animals not merely astral counterparts to their physical bodies, but astral bodies, in some of which, as regards the highest animals, self-consciousness has at last found its dwelling-place. Here in the animal world memory is the stirring of the mental permanent atom, around which a body is gradually being built as the life presses ever inwards.

Memory below the animal need not be considered from the standpoint of our present subject, but in the animal it begins to provide the mental consciousness which man will need to use. In the case of the animal world the waking consciousness, while in the physical brain, is made up not only of the ordinary physical-plane impacts, but also of the workings of the life on the astral plane in its

physical manifestation. We shall not speak of the animal being self-conscious on the astral plane, for that would mean that it is as conscious of the astral world as it is of the physical world. But it may safely be said that in its waking physical state, it lives to a large extent under the sway of the impacts of its astral body translated into physical terms, such impacts being either from the surrounding astral world or reactions from physical-plane conditions.

The same remarks apply to any mental impressions to which it may be able to respond. Still less has it any self-consciousness on the mental plane of the mental world around it, but it has faint stirrings in the mental permanent atom, due either to impacts from its own sphere or to those from the plane next below. In the case of the animal, the earthquakes and the shocks which were referred to in connection with the mineral kingdom, are represented in the passions and emotions which come from the awakening of its astral consciousness. And some day, when a portion of the consciousness which has been sent down into manifestation has gained sufficient experience, has become strong and comparatively self-conscious, it reaches upwards through some great and unexampled stirring to the Third Great Force, or Life-Wave, on which the Monad comes to assume more definite and complete control of its lower vehicles through itself as the *jīvātmā*, in its manifestation on the three higher planes of nature—the higher *mānasic*, the *buḍḍhic*, and the *ātmic*. On the plane of Manas does this great meeting take

place, the individualisation of consciousness, so that the Monad, through its ego, abides in its own separated form, the first clear image which has up to this time existed of its future vehicle. The Monad assumes charge of its own separated portion of consciousness, and evolves through it into a Flame which is the likeness of the whole from which it sprang.

Thus does the animal become man, and thus do we see that man's waking consciousness is composed of his astral and mental consciousness working in the physical consciousness which only emerges above the line of unconsciousness when its harmony is disturbed—with the result that it ceases to function automatically—or when through certain practices of Yoga it is deliberately brought within the region of the waking consciousness.

I have already suggested that it is necessary to discriminate between consciousness functioning self-consciously on any plane, and the reflection of the stirrings of consciousness from the higher to the lower, or from the lower to the higher. Each plane of nature, as we have already been told in previous lectures, consists of seven sub-planes, each sub-plane increasing in density and coarseness as there is approach to the plane below. The result is that the upward-pressing life has first to make its way through the denser regions of a plane before it may reach the finer levels. So the primeval man, the savage, receives the impacts which give him the astral portion of his own individual waking consciousness from the lower divisions of

the astral plane; for the life, though it has just penetrated into the mental world above, has not yet made the channels which shall convey the conscious message from the higher regions of the astral. When living in the physical body, when the seat of consciousness is normally in the physical brain, the ordinary savage is hardly awake at all in his astral vehicle, even during the sleep condition; and it is not until death comes that he may be said to live, and then only for a short time, self-consciously on the astral plane. The man who is more highly evolved, however, has represented in his normal waking consciousness not only the higher regions of the astral plane, but also the lower regions of the mental plane. And as he gains mastery over these lower regions, through asserting the dominance of the higher, his waking consciousness gradually begins to include a knowledge of the world of these two planes, as he already has a knowledge of the world of the physical plane.

In the ordinary waking consciousness of the average man, he *is* his feelings, he *is* his thoughts, for the Self in these regions has not yet been distinguished from the Not-Self; but as the consciousness retires inwards it is seen apart from its vehicles, and so man becomes the master of his mind, the master of his desires; for he sees that these are but his bodies which, in the infinite future, when themselves ideal and perfect, he will use as planes of nature, in which will function his unity in its separated aspects—his divinity in its resultant sparks.

The activity, the stirring, of the astral and mental consciousness depends ultimately, of course, upon the great upward sweep towards the goal of unity. But the struggle of the stirring is of interest, in that we clearly see how the qualities of the downward stretching into matter differ in quality from those appropriate to the tending upwards towards Spirit. The astral constituents, for example, emotions of all kinds—moral, æsthetic, personal—work through the nervous system, into the brain-cells of the physical vehicle; and their effect is either to press the life backwards (at least to keep the life from flowing upwards), or to push it upwards until it reaches Buddhi. Thus the mind, which works through the astral on to the physical brain, is, if the emotions are good, pressed forward so that it touches the buddhic level of consciousness through the causal plane (the higher mānasic), while, if the emotions are of what we call the passionate variety, the mind is drawn downwards and becomes entangled with the body, thus producing a condition which is often dangerous.

It must also be noticed that the activities of the mental body especially, caused by changes in the mental-plane consciousness, depend for their reproduction in the physical brain upon the actual physical development of the brain itself. Before the age of seven years, for example, there is comparatively little inter-communication between the large nucleated cells of the brain; and though the activities of the mental body may be quite considerable, they will not

enter what is called the waking consciousness, which has its seat in the physical brain, because the brain has not yet grown so as to provide a vehicle of sufficient delicacy. Hence there is little in the way of reasoning before the age of seven, so far as the waking consciousness is concerned, though the power of observation will be well-marked and the senses of considerable acuteness.

We see, therefore, that the waking consciousness depends to a very considerable extent, I might almost say entirely, upon the development and condition of the physical brain. The astral constituents are those first brought clearly through, because these have been longer under control, or at least within the waking consciousness; and it is for this reason that the education of a child begins with observation and perception, and with training the sense of pleasure-pain, along the line of education, before the faculty of reasoning is sought to be established. As the child grows older, more and more constituents enter into the waking consciousness, as the brain learns to respond more clearly and gains in complexity in order to meet the ever-increasing demands of the stirrings of consciousness in the inner planes.

The physical brain, in fact, is like a musical instrument on which the *jīvātma* plays, and the music he is able to make depends to a considerable degree upon the power of the instrument to respond accurately to his intentions. Thus, within the waking consciousness, a disordered brain may distort the impressions from the inner planes, just as a piano which is out of

tune will distort the music which it is desired to produce. The disorder of the brain may work in either of two ways. It may produce unrecognisable travesties of the realities beneath, or it may for the time—especially if over-strained—bring through visions of the inner glories which shall be a revelation to the outer world. But the disorder remains, and the risk of madness in either case is great, *i.e.*, the risk of the brain being to so great an extent disordered that the waking consciousness consists only of distorted impressions from within and from without.

Let us now turn to the consideration of the abnormal conditions of the waking consciousness which are classified, in the programme of the present lecture, under the heading "Genius". We may roughly distinguish three very distinct types of genius, each having its own special source of manifestation, but all depending upon some special upward stirring, calling down from some finer plane of matter a response in terms of infinitely wider consciousness. The genius proper, for example, he who from time to time possesses sudden and far-reaching ideas, or who receives inspirations in the shape of creative forces showing themselves in invention, obtains his illumination from the higher mānasic plane, a is reproducing the activity of the ego on the plane of its activity—the causal. A flash of the causal-body consciousness comes down and vivifies the whole mental process in a most extraordinary way, and we call this vivification or illumination genius.

It must be noticed, however, that a very highly organised brain is an indispensable preliminary to genius, for there must be the strong upward striving ere the downward response will be possible. And the fact that at our present stage of evolution the various brain-processes are by no means so completely developed as to provide a normal means of communication with the finer planes, has the effect of causing genius to be unstable, because the brain itself is in a state of unstable equilibrium—now making its connection with the inner worlds, now losing it. The preliminary sparks and flashes, before the two poles of an electric magnet are carefully adjusted, will give us an idea of the way in which genius acts.

If the brain be very delicately organised, the pressure from within, while producing flashes of genius, may at times cause the vagaries of genius which are so familiar to us, and may give rise to certain aberrations or fixed ideas, which often seem so incongruous in the man of genius. The brain has not as yet become the perfect mechanism which will afford a perfect means of communication between the higher and the lower, and the aberrations, vagaries and flashes of genius are the signs of the struggle of the soul towards a self-consciousness wider than those it has hitherto known. Perhaps we may even think that they are the counterparts on the higher levels of the violent physical upheavals of which I spoke in connection with the mineral kingdom.

The second aspect of genius to which I would draw attention is that of the saint, he who lives from time

to time in those raptures and ecstasies described in Professor James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*. In this case, it is not the causal consciousness which is brought down, but the consciousness working on the buddhic plane. The higher emotions working in the higher levels of the astral plane send out their call to the consciousness stirring on the buddhic plane, and the result is an outpouring of buddhic consciousness, which still further stimulates the highest sub-planes of the astral and causes a rapture, the reflection of that aspect of the unity which is the dominating influence of buddhic plane life. Here, as in the former case, the delicately balanced brain will not permit of the communication being complete and continuous, and so in this case also there are the same aberrations and vagaries referred to in the former condition of genius.

The third aspect is that of the hero, he who appeals to the ātmic consciousness, with the result that a flash of ātmic consciousness enters the physical brain itself and causes the heroic action. Here also the brain must have considerable development, the result of action of a noble character in past lives. In this way the brain becomes specially sensitive to vibrations from the ātmic plane, and, in times of stress and of emergency, the appeal, ringing out with the force of many lives of action behind it, imperatively commands the flash of Ātmā to direct into what the world calls heroism the action which has to be performed. It is obvious in this case also that the aberrations referred to above must similarly be present, and the hero of the moment is by no means necessarily the

hero in his everyday life. At his existing stage of evolution the appeal cannot be made continuously, and so the heroic stage can be reached but fitfully. With the seat of physical action, the brain proper, so inadequately developed, we must not imagine that the astral or mental consciousnesses themselves are deficient. These too must have reached a certain level, or the action could not be heroic, for astral and mental constituents enter into heroism, just as astral and mental constituents enter into the being of the saint. But the dominant factor in each case determines the mode of the expression of the genius, of that higher condition of the waking consciousness which with us can be but fitful and spasmodic.

It now becomes increasingly apparent why, from one standpoint, the *jīvātmā*, the ego, the representation of the Monad, contains within itself the triple aspect of *Ātmā*, *Buddhi*, *Manas*. Each of these vehicles will respond, when the time comes, to the special direction given by the spark of the divine Flame to its growing self-consciousness, and each vehicle is itself a reflection of that triple aspect of the great Flame itself—*Saṭ*, *Chit*, *Ānanda*, or whatever other designations may be appropriate, under varying conditions of manifestation. We see, therefore, that the triplicity of manifested consciousness enters into the life-stream flowing upwards to bring self-consciousness to its own Divinity, and that the triplicity, with one special branch dominant, is within the waking consciousness of the growing spark in an ever-increasing degree. From this we may conclude that, even at its

earliest outpouring or manifestation, each Monad was born under some special aspect of the Divinity, as a man is born under a special star ; and we may expect that the full glory of the Flame in all its Self-conscious Divinity contains within itself a dominant sound, the sound of its own birth-aspects.

It is not within my province to deal with the waking consciousness of man beyond the mortal bodies. Others will speak of the beauties of that waking consciousness which is the glorious possession of the soul which is nearing its perfection, of the waking consciousness which embraces the causal, or the buddhic, or the âtmic planes. These are of the immortal Individual, and we in the present lecture of the series are confined within the limits of the mortal person.

Let me, therefore, in conclusion, endeavour to begin the bridge which shall span the gulf between the mortal person and the immortal Individual, by making a few suggestions as to the control and preliminary development of that part of the waking consciousness which includes the astral and the mental consciousness.

We are concerned with three great departments in our ordinary waking consciousness: the mind, the emotions, the physical body. Most people, as I have already said, *are* their minds, *are* their emotions, *are* their bodies. But, as has been said in *At the Feet of the Master*, the body is our horse ; and we may imagine ourselves as driving a team of three—the horse of the body, the horse of the emotions, and

the horse of the mind. The "we" is each individual *jīvātmā* or ego, which is the reflection of the divine Flame, the "will" to manifest and to multiply. But *we* must drive, or we shall be dragged; and the science of growing life consists in the making of deliberate effort to hold and to control the forces of Nature, for such holding and controlling is the acquiring of self-consciousness. This effort is the science of Yoga, Hatha Yoga, when begun from below, Rāja Yoga when begun from above, and in ordinary English we may speak of it as meditation.

Meditation may be said to consist in growing accustomed to the instrument in connection with which the meditation takes place, in gradually learning how to draw out from the instrument its various capacities and possibilities. And meditation therefore means deliberately and intelligently exercised attention from the higher to the lower. Creative attention is that which renders the various vehicles more sensitive to the finer vibrations from the less dense planes of nature; and it is this kind of attention through which our will must work, rather than through that form of attention which seeks to retard the process of self-consciousness by maintaining the coarser, denser forms of manifestation. It is our business, therefore, to direct the waking consciousness towards the higher, and not towards the lower, by being alert, in all our daily occupations whatever they may be, and in spending a certain amount of time each day in arousing the mind and the emotions at the command of the

will. We do this by *directing* the thought and the feeling towards certain definite objects, through certain definite channels, and in this way the waking consciousness grows more alert, more *self-conscious*, and in its growth expands.

Meditation affects the mind by gradually endowing it with (i) one-pointedness, (ii) flexibility, (iii) obedience. Meditation affects the emotions by endowing them with serenity, by cultivating the higher emotions and by eradicating the lower. And the result of such a meditation, sedulously performed, is to give an alertness to the physical brain, and consequently a promptitude of action which is ever the mark of growing self-consciousness.

Thus does consciousness work its way through sheath after sheath, first of matter of ever-increasing density, then of matter of ever-decreasing density, from the unconscious to the increasingly self-conscious. And as the Self becomes conscious on the various planes of manifestation, he withdraws inwards, leaving below the level of waking consciousness all that he has learned to master and to control. Inwards he retires, realising himself in plane after plane of finer and finer matter, until the spark has become a Flame, which finally shines in all its glory on its own plane, as did the Flame from which it came. Then comes its turn to send out its waves of growth and power, that all the life within its nature, all the life below the level of its waking consciousness (which is the plane of its Divinity) may grow as the Flame itself has grown. So does the

unconscious part, without whose presence the whole would not have become a whole, receive the reward of its service, blossoming out into a self-sufficient unity as the bud expands into the full-blown flower.

